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SUBJECT: THE HARPER GOVERNMENT'S BLUEPRINT FOR PARLIAMENT

REF: A. OTTAWA 1910
-- B. OTTAWA 1922

¶1. (U) In a tradition-heavy ceremony on October 16 that also broke with tradition by taking place in the early evening rather than mid-afternoon, Canada's Governor General opened the new session of Parliament by reading the government's "Speech from the Throne," which lays out clearly the agenda and vision of Prime Minister Stephen Harper for the coming session. (Septel will discuss the Liberal opposition's response on October 17.) The government focused on five core priorities that will create what it called a "better, stronger, safer Canada."

"A PROUD AND SOVEREIGN CANADA"

¶2. (U) Afghanistan: for the first time, the Speech clarified that "our government does not believe that Canada should simply abandon the people of Afghanistan after February 2009." It stated that Canada should instead build on its accomplishments and shift to accelerate the training of the Afghan army and police, a task that "will not be completed by February 2009" but "should be achievable by 2011, the end of the period covered by the Afghanistan Compact."

The government specified that a majority of Parliament would have to approve the mission's future and its timetable, but argued that Afghanistan is the area in which Canada can most clearly "make a difference" in the world and that this decision should honor the progress and sacrifices of Canadians, ensure further progress, and uphold Canada's international commitments and reputation. It highlighted that this role was part of a UN-sanctioned mission that both was both "noble and necessary."

¶3. (U) World role: declaring its message to the world that "Canada is back," the government promised to rebuild the Canadian Forces with better equipment and training in order to meet Canada's responsibilities to the UN and to its allies and to promote shared values of freedom, human rights, and rule of law. It announced it would seek Parliamentary approval of honorary Canadian citizenship for Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. It pledged to maintain an active role in the Americas, citing Haiti as an example of working together with neighbors to help build democracy in a fragile state.

¶4. (U) Arctic strategy: acknowledging "new opportunities and new challenges," the government pledged an "integrated northern strategy" to strengthen Canada's sovereignty, protect the northern environment, promote economic and social development, and devolve governance to northern communities. It announced its plan to build a "world-class arctic research station that will be on the cutting edge of arctic issues," including environmental science and resource development and the completion of comprehensive mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed. It underscored that Canada's sovereignty in the North demands that Canada "maintains the capacity to act" with new arctic patrol ships and expanded aerial surveillance to guard the North and the Northwest Passage. It also reaffirmed previously announced plans to increase the size and capabilities of the

indigenous aboriginal Arctic Rangers.

"A STRONG FEDERATION"

¶15. (U) Relations with provinces: the government promised to "reinvent" neglected federal responsibilities and cited the federal role in strengthening the "economic union" and promoting freer trade among provinces. The speech noted that "it is often harder to move goods and services across provincial boundaries than across our international borders. . . (which) hurts our competitive position." It pledged to limit federal spending power for shared cost programs in areas with exclusive provincial jurisdictions.

"A PROSPEROUS FUTURE"

¶16. (U) IPR: the government announced its intention "to improve cultural and intellectual property rights (IPR) in Canada, including copyright reform.

¶17. (U) Taxes: the speech described a "long-term plan of broad-based tax relief for individuals, businesses, and families" as well as to cut again the federal government sales tax.

¶18. (U) Infrastructure: in a "Building Canada Plan" the government described efforts to improve transport and trade hubs, including the Windsor-Detroit corridor and the Atlantic and Pacific gateways.

¶19. (U) Agriculture: the speech indicated that the government plans to promote biofuels, while reiterating "strong support for Canada's supply-managed system" of agriculture.

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"A SAFE AND SECURE CANADA"

¶10. (U) Law and order: noting that peace, order, and good government are the "birthrights" of Canadians and that it had "no greater responsibilities" than protecting these, the government announced its plans to introduce a comprehensive omnibus "Tackling Violent Crime bill" that will incorporate previous flagship bills on mandatory minimum sentences for serious gun crime and impaired driving and against dangerous offenders that did not pass in the last session. (Some bills had passed the lower house but not the Senate already, but this packaging is new.) The government warned the opposition that "Canadians expect prompt passage of this crucial legislation." Other new bills will crack down on drug producers and pushers, strengthen the youth justice system, and crack down on property crime. The government also pledged to ensure effective law enforcement, including seeking resources to recruit 2,500 more police officers, and vigorously to pursue its new National Anti-Drug Strategy.

¶11. (U) National security: the government promised to "address Canadians directly" on the challenge of terrorism with a statement on national security. It will introduce legislation to strengthen the Anti-Terrorism Act and to respond to the February 2007 Supreme Court decision on the unconstitutionality of immigration security certificates.

"A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR CANADIANS"

¶12. (U) Kyoto: the Speech highlighted that the challenge of climate change requires a global solution and must include binding targets on major emitters. It admitted frankly that Canada's emissions cannot be in compliance with the Kyoto Protocol by the required date of January 1, 2008. The government pledged to pursue a two-track process of pursuing a global consensus while moving to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions at home 60-70% by 2050. The government announced plans to bring back to the lower house legislation containing elements from the failed Clean Air Act that had all-party consensus (likely provisions on air pollutants) and to

put Canada "at the forefront" of clean technology.